

scrolls of the *Haftara* (the biblical books read during the service to aid exposition of the *Torah*), and at least one scroll of the Psalms. There were probably other texts there as well, such as non-canonical writings like Enoch and Baruch.³

Paul may not have been flavor of the month among the Jews but there must have been ways in which he could have found out the information. In fact, if they were any kind of famous, published books, he wouldn't have needed to have them sent from Troas. He could have sourced them in Rome. So what could they have been?

THE BIBLIA AND THE MEMBRANAE

Paul mentions two different types of written media in this verse: *biblia* and *membranae*.

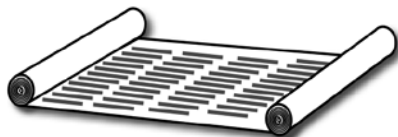
Biblia literally means “books” (and is the root of our modern word Bible). In Paul's day it meant scrolls such as those housed in a library. It is also used of secular, civil documents, such as the certificate of divorce (Matt.19.7; Mark 10.4), as well as of the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Membranae means “parchment” – the skin of sheep or goats which made a more durable writing material than a papyrus scroll. However, although this letter is written in Greek, the word is actually a Latin word and referred to small notebooks of parchment which people would carry with them. They were the kind of thing someone might write everyday notes in, or a poet use to draw up the first drafts.⁴ The notebook consisted of several small sheets of parchment, loosely held by leather bands, a bit like a loose-leaf file.

Originally made, as in Paul's letter, of parchment, some time in the first century someone got the idea that you could make *membranae* out of papyrus. They folded sheets of papyrus and sewed through the spine. These are called codices (or codex in the singular) and they are the same basic format as the book you have

³ Thiede, *The Cosmopolitan World of Jesus: New Findings From Archaeology*, 111. This is what happened at Beroea – the Jews in the synagogue listened to Paul and then studied the Scriptures to make up their own minds. In other words, they went to their own theological research library.

⁴ Roberts, C.H. “Books in the Graeco-Roman World and the New Testament” in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), I, 53.



Scroll (left) and codex (right). Scrolls were long sheets of papyrus, with writing on one side. A codex was made by taking sheets of parchment or papyrus, folding them, and putting a stitch through the middle to bind it. Codices could also have wooden covers affording them more protection.

in your hand. In other words, when someone took some papyrus sheets, folded them and sewed them together, then wrote on both sides of the page, they invented, in fact, the book.

This new invention took a long time to catch on in the Græco-Roman world. For them, *membranae* were not proper books. Only scrolls were “proper” books. And so the notebooks were relegated to the status of informal, unimportant documents.

Except among one group of people.

CHRISTIANS AND THEIR NOTEBOOKS

One of the remarkable things about Christian literature from the second and third centuries is that it is virtually all from codices. In the Græco-Roman and Jewish traditions, the scroll was ubiquitous; everything was written on a scroll, but Christians used books.

We have some fourteen fragments of Christian literature from the first half of the second century (100–150AD). All of these came from codices. When you compare this to Græco-Roman literature of the same period, only 2.5% is in codex form.⁵ Of the remains of Greek books that can be dated earlier than 200AD, more than 98 percent are scrolls; in the same period the surviving Christian books are almost all codices. In fact, it wasn’t until the fourth century that the codex use equalled that of the scroll in the wider Græco-Roman

⁵ Gregory, C.R., *Canon and Text of the New Testament*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1907), 322–323.

world. What this shows is that the Christians, for some reason, adopted the use of the codex almost exclusively, in direct contrast to the general expectations of the culture around them.⁶

Given the fact that Christians were choosing to use the codex much more than non-Christians, some scholars have argued that it was a Christian who first folded papyrus and “invented” the book: “Where and by whom the idea was first tried out we do not know; but we do now know that the new form [i.e. the papyrus codex] is directly connected with the earliest days of Christianity and that the inventor may actually have been a Christian.”⁷

Why did they do this? We have already seen that the Græco-Roman world didn’t view the codex as a “proper” book, yet Christians chose this medium to communicate the most important message they had. Scholars have suggested many reasons why they might have used this innovative new communication method. Some have suggested it could be more easily hidden, or that it offered easier access to the contents. The codex could be held in one hand, leaving the other free to make notes or mark a place. Codices were often bound with wooden covers, which gave the contents more protection. All of those are possible advantages, but they don’t really explain why the Early Church made the decision to use this form of media to the total exclusion of the scroll.

I think that there were two main reasons why the first Christians chose the codex form to transmit their teaching.

Firstly, *membranae* were common among craftsmen and traders, who used them as everyday notebooks. Many of the people in the Early Church were from this background – free craftspeople, artisans and small traders, who had some wealth and therefore the ability to travel – they would have been used to this form. It was their media; they understood it.⁸ More than that, the language in these early codices was *koine* Greek; the type of Greek spoken by ordinary tradesmen and workers. Christianity made a deliberate

⁶ Gamble, H.Y., *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 49.

⁷ Skeat, T.C., and Elliot, J.K., *The Collected Biblical Writings of T. C. Skeat*, (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 46.

⁸ Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts*, 5.

choice to use the language and the media of the ordinary working people of the society around them.⁹

But many scholars believe that perhaps the main reason that Christians used the codex is that they were continuing a tradition which had been established by the most important leaders of their church. They used the codex, because that was the form in which their first Scriptures were recorded. These Scriptures could have been the gospels, or Mark's first record of Peter's reminiscences. However, the earliest writings in the New Testament are not the gospels, but letters written by Paul.

Paul's letters were collected and passed around the church at a very early date. The letters themselves date from around 48/9AD with Galatians, with Thessalonians written a little while later. But at some point the letters were collected and copied to become the first Scriptures of the young church (see 2 Peter 3.15–16). Any collection of Paul's letters – even if we reduce it to those whose authorship is undisputed – would be too long for a scroll. But they could be contained in a codex. Whereas the outside of a scroll was left blank, a codex used both sides of the paper, offering greater storage capacity.¹⁰ So the Early Church, perhaps, brought together Paul's letters – their first Scriptures – in a codex; and from then on, almost in tribute, passed on all their teaching in this new, vernacular form.

BACK TO THE NOTEBOOKS

Which brings us back to the notebooks of Paul. We've seen that they must have contained personal information, since that's what membranae were used for. We've seen that the Early Church preserved a tradition of recording their teaching in the codex – the successor to the parchment notebooks mentioned here. We've seen that Paul is drawing things together, bringing his trusted friends around him and preparing for the end.

It seems likely, therefore, that what he's doing is collecting together his life's work. The scrolls may be official documents,

⁹ Lee, G.M. "The Books and the Parchments: Studies in Texts: 2 Timothy 4:13." *Theology* 74 (1971), 169.

¹⁰ Quoted in Casson, L. *Libraries in the Ancient World*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 124.